

## Talking Points with Mary Peters of FHWA about Oahu transportation issues

**Background:** Island-wide perception that congestion is increasing and government organizations are unable to deliver projects to improve island mobility. Since last November's elections, several top-down proposals have been reported in the press. Governor of Hawaii proposed a short-lived hot lane concept. State legislature held hearings and considered legislation for a light rail project. Honolulu city council indicates lack of support for long-studied BRT project. Governor convenes a task force of Oahu and state transportation experts to identify a plan to improve transportation in a coordinated manner. Task force seeks direct recommendations from FHWA and FTA. FHWA and FTA are willing to increase technical assistance but are not interested in recommending projects.

**Issue:** While avoiding direct project recommendations, what type of assistance can the FHWA and FTA offer to set the island on a course to improve transportation planning and project development with short and long run benefits.

### **Recommendations:**

1) Identify and contract with multi-modal transportation expert to facilitate meetings with local officials to identify the necessary steps to improving island transportation systems. The "expert" would:

- Immediately sets forth each agency in a systematic identification and prioritization of short-range capacity improvements.
- Assist in the full and complete identification of resources including innovative financing methods.
- Identify the strategic components to a successful public funding strategies.
- Develop objective project prioritization methods to avoid top down decisions.
- Identify nationwide resources that can serve as examples.
- Assist in recommending practices to develop existing management and staff at SDOT, DTS and OMPO.
- Recommend successful organizational structures.

2) Avoid the neglect of other islands. Oahu vs. the rest of the state was an image that concerned the prior state administration. Manage perceptions of biased funding decisions by emphasizing objective project prioritization. A clear identification of resources and commitments will improve the integrity of programming decisions.

3) Take another look at all programs and projects. Evaluate whether continued commitment to a project is worthwhile. Clearly the BRT and its first phase is an example of questionable transportation benefit. FHWA's objective evaluation of highway projects and their utility would be beneficial. Evaluate recent studies to date and assess what may be currently useful to rapidly develop a new alternative.

4) The reliability of management information systems needs to be addressed to determine the level of cost overruns that are associated with projects under construction. I am suspecting that cost estimating procedures should be strengthened.

5) There are transportation success stories on the island. DTS was recently identified by APTA as a top as a top performing transit agency. Build public confidence in island transportation organizations by promoting these successes. Objectively identify source of public discontent. Adapt response to the discontent. Address long-standing neglected public complaints at the lowest levels. Identify short-term projects, easy to implement projects, that will have immediate beneficial impacts. Projects that improve signalization are immediately noticeable and help improve capacity. Additional bus priority signals should be phased-in. Coordinate highway and bus information systems in a central location. DTS may have FTA-assisted space for a project of this type.

6) FTA to provide continued HQ and Regional assistance. To identify trends, Region to review recent State Management Reviews, Grantee Triennial Reviews, Audit findings and MPO Certification Reviews. HQ and Region to identify tasks for Volpe assistance, peer reviews, and focus on future reviews to identify findings to stimulate beneficial changes. On April 29 and 30, FTA and FHWA will be conducting a triennial planning and certification review of OMPO. Assistance from FTA and FHWA Headquarters would be beneficial. This could be a real opportunity to improve local processes.

7) FHWA to provide assistance to SDOT. SDOT is unable to develop short-range plans and generally has a low-performing management and staff. Also, FHWA could provide direct technical assistance on issues about Interstate H1's nonconforming design status. Apparently, widths and shoulders are inadequate and SDOT appears to be unclear as to whether waivers or other mitigations are possible. This lack of knowledge appears to inhibit project development.